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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The report is also submitted in response to General Assembly resolutions 61/220 and 63/139 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2008/36.

The present report describes the major humanitarian trends and challenges that have occurred during the past year and analyses two thematic issues of concern: respecting and implementing guiding principles of humanitarian assistance at the operational level and addressing the impact of current global challenges and trends on the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. The report provides an overview of current key processes to improve humanitarian coordination and ends with recommendations for further strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report responds to the requests contained in General Assembly resolutions 63/139, 61/220 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2008/36. The period covered by the report is June 2008 to May 2009.

II. Overview of humanitarian trends and challenges

2. The global demand for humanitarian assistance, including requests for assistance by national Governments, continues to rise. This is triggered and sustained by increased severity of natural hazards, escalating conflict, and a dramatic increase in vulnerabilities caused by the global financial crisis, continuing high food prices, the scarcity of energy and water, population growth and urbanization. In 2009, the humanitarian consolidated appeal process requested $8.6 billion to provide 30 million people with life-saving assistance, an increase of almost 23 per cent from 2008 requirements ($7 billion to support 25 million people).

3. During the reporting period, extreme weather events — such as floods, cyclones and droughts — continued to trigger humanitarian emergencies, causing over 235,000 deaths and affecting more than 211 million people. There is growing scientific consensus that the increased severity and frequency of hazard events — other than earthquakes and volcanoes — are more than 90 per cent likely to be a result of climate change.

4. Complex emergencies continue to affect tens of millions of people, and subsequent internal and cross-border movements of people constitute major concerns. For the first time since 2005, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported a decrease in the global number of refugees from 11.4 million in 2007 to 10.5 million by the end of 2008. This decrease is attributed primarily to successful voluntary repatriation operations in Afghanistan, Burundi and the Sudan, and to a revision of Iraqi and Colombian refugee estimates. However, 26 million people are internally displaced owing to conflict, insecurity and persecution, while many millions more are displaced owing to natural hazards.

A. Disasters associated with natural hazards

5. In 2008, the Centre for the Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reported 321 disasters associated with natural hazards. Climate-related disasters caused almost three quarters of the damage inflicted by natural hazards. While this marked a decrease from the average number of disasters — 398 — recorded annually for the period 2000-2007, their impact and severity increased. In 2008, the number of deaths caused by disasters stemming from natural hazards was three times the average for 2000-2007, and their economic cost was estimated at $181 billion, twice the average of 2000-2007. The spike in casualties and cost was attributed to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, which caused 138,366 deaths; the Sichuan earthquake in China, which caused 87,476 deaths and some $85 billion in losses; and Hurricane Ike in the United States of America, which caused economic losses estimated at $30 billion.

6. With nine countries recording the highest numbers of disaster related-deaths in 2008, Asia continued to be the region most affected. Heavy monsoon rains caused severe flooding and affected more than half a million people in India, Nepal and Pakistan. In October 2008, an earthquake in Pakistan's Balochistan Province affected 68,200 people and destroyed or damaged around 7,600 houses. In Indonesia, flash floods killed 54 persons, displaced 31,500 people and inundated 45,700 houses. In December 2008, a combination of king tides, high seas and tropical depressions in the Pacific caused flooding of numerous low-lying islands and coastal regions of Papua New Guinea, affecting 75,000 people.

7. Natural hazards have also aggravated the impact of complex emergencies in regions such as the Horn of Africa, where intense drought, unprecedented high food prices and insecurity continue to jeopardize livelihoods and erode the community-coping mechanisms of 19 million people. While the October-December 2008 rains were low in parts of Ethiopia and Somalia, flooding and cyclones affected 1.2 million persons in Angola, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe in early 2009. Heavy seasonal floods and rains displaced over 40,000 people in Southern Sudan, and, combined with landslides, have affected over 300,000 people in Kenya. Flooding in West Africa in July 2008 affected over 150,000 people in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Niger, Mali, Senegal and Togo. In the Middle East, Yemen faced the most devastating flash floods in decades, displacing an estimated 25,000 people. The Syrian Arab Republic is experiencing its worst drought in 40 years, affecting an estimated 1 million people.

8. Moreover, in 2008 the Atlantic hurricane season was extremely active, with 16 tropical storms, 5 of which were high intensity hurricanes. In August and September 2008, Cuba was hit by four successive hurricanes and tropical storms, which damaged or destroyed some 500,000 homes. In Haiti, these same hazards affected more than 800,000 people and caused losses estimated at $900 million, 15 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Guatemala and Panama experienced an intense rainy season, affecting 180,000 persons and 23,300 persons, respectively. In Eastern Europe heavy rains and storms in the summer of 2008 led to severe flooding, affecting 40,000 people in the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

9. Where Governments and affected communities were adequately prepared, an effective response to natural hazards could be mounted before they happened. Where Governments needed and requested international assistance, the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were mostly able and ready to respond. The international humanitarian system issued nine flash appeals, seven of which were in response to climate-related disasters. Additionally, the United Nations deployed 15 United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams to assess needs and coordinate humanitarian response. UNDAC, in collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 63/137, 63/139 and 63/141, have also strengthened the legal preparedness of interested Member States at the national level for international disaster assistance using the 2007 Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance.

B. Complex emergencies

10. During the reporting period, the humanitarian community had to place an increased focus on the impacts of several escalating complex emergencies. In some instances, these impacts were further compounded by the effects of natural hazards and global challenges such as the food, financial and fuel crises. Within this difficult environment, national Governments, regional organizations, donors and national and international humanitarian organizations have responded, often jointly, to the pressing needs of millions of people. However, gaining safe, unimpeded and timely access to many of the victims continues to be one of the key challenges for the humanitarian community.

11. The humanitarian operation in Darfur continues its daily struggle to provide assistance to 4.75 million civilians affected by conflict, including 2.81 million internally displaced persons, of which 90,000 became newly displaced in 2009. Now in its sixth year, the conflict shows no signs of coming to an end and humanitarian response operations are undermined by insecurity and by acts such as the expulsion by the Government of the Sudan, on 4 March 2009, of 13 international NGOs and the suspension of 3 national NGOs. This significantly reduced response capacity in the health, food, nutrition, protection, shelter, water and sanitation sectors. Major efforts are continuing to fill the gaps, and build a better operating environment for the future, to enable capacity to be replaced on a sustainable basis. There is also the expectation that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), once fully deployed, will be able to play a role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance by establishing a more secure environment. The ongoing conflict in the Darfur region could also undermine the 2005 North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement, particularly since the NGO expulsions negatively impact the delivery of humanitarian assistance in other parts of the Sudan. In Southern Sudan, recent tribal violence conducted with large numbers of small arms and assault weapons has led to the destruction of entire villages, the displacement of 30,000 people and more than 1,000 killed or taken prisoner, including women and children. The grave humanitarian situation is further aggravated by severe seasonal constraints on access.

12. The fighting in Sri Lanka, which came to an end in May 2009, has resulted in an influx of around 250,000 internally displaced persons into Government-controlled areas. The fighting has been marked by the repeated use of heavy weapons by the Sri Lankan armed forces in attacks on areas containing large numbers of civilians, including the so-called no-fire zones, with reports of multiple strikes on medical facilities. The fundamental problem was the refusal of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to allow civilians within its control to seek safety in an attempt to render areas immune from attack and to seek military and propaganda advantage. The consequences for civilians have been catastrophic. Thousands have been killed and wounded and their plight has been further compounded by extremely limited access to humanitarian assistance.

13. In Somalia, prevailing high levels of insecurity, the compounding effects of ongoing drought and the impact of the food crisis have caused a 50 per cent increase in the humanitarian caseload. Currently, 3.25 million Somalis require humanitarian assistance, of whom 1.9 million are affected by food insecurity caused by a severe drought, low cereal production and a 230 per cent and 350 per cent increase in the prices of imported rice and cereals, respectively. The number of acutely

malnourished children under the age of five has increased by 30 per cent from 2008, reaching an estimated 300,000, of whom 60,000 are severely malnourished. Ongoing armed conflict remains the primary reason for the displacement of 1.3 million Somalis, while attacks on humanitarian personnel continue to hamper humanitarian operations particularly across the south-central parts of the country.

14. The sustained closure of Gaza for all but the most essential commodities since June 2007 has increased the vulnerability levels of its 1.4 million inhabitants. Israeli military operations from December 2008 to January 2009 exacerbated an already severe humanitarian situation. According to the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health, 1,440 Palestinians were killed and 5,380 were injured during the military campaign. Despite clear markings, hospitals, ambulances, United Nations and other civilian facilities were hit, 9 United Nations and associated personnel were killed and 11 were injured. The hostilities caused the destruction of infrastructure and essential services, resulting in severe shortages of power, water, food, shelter and medical services. At the same time, the persistent and indiscriminate launching of rocket fire into southern Israel spread fear among the civilian population and caused a number of casualties. Despite a fragile, and still unofficial, ceasefire, restrictions continue to hamper the entry of relief items and humanitarian staff into Gaza. I, together with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, have stressed the urgent need for free and sustained movement of humanitarian personnel and supplies, and have appealed to warring parties to respect the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance. However, the provision of humanitarian assistance remains below what is urgently required, and basic goods necessary for reconstruction and infrastructure rehabilitation remain banned.

15. During the reporting period, conflict in the Kivus and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) incursions into the north-western part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have caused massive population displacement. Targeted attacks against civilians, the high prevalence of sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers and summary executions by armed groups have caused a significant deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Delivery of humanitarian aid has been particularly challenging and humanitarian access has been considerably constrained by repeated attacks on humanitarian premises, convoys and personnel as well as by deteriorating or non-existent transport infrastructure. In North Kivu, there are currently 930,000 internally displaced persons and South Kivu hosts 419,000 internally displaced persons. In Haut and Bas Uele, 220,000 people have been forced to flee LRA-perpetrated violence, and some 1,133 have been killed. A renewed LRA presence has also reportedly caused some 100,000 people to be displaced, and many killed, in the Western Equatoria region of Southern Sudan.

16. The humanitarian situation in Pakistan has deteriorated as ongoing conflict in the north-west region has negatively affected millions of civilians. Moreover, population movements are increasing, with families seeking refuge from violence during recent military offensives. At the time of writing, over 2 million people had been registered as internally displaced persons. The United Nations is currently engaged in supporting the Government of Pakistan in addressing the most pressing humanitarian needs of the affected populations, has revised the Humanitarian Response Plan and issued a new appeal to meet the needs of 1.5 million internally displaced persons and affected populations for the rest of 2009. The United Nations and its partners have been able to deliver basic assistance to most of the initially

registered internally displaced persons. However, insecurity and insufficient funding hamper assistance to affected communities.

17. In Afghanistan, the combined effects of rising insecurity and a severe drought have increased humanitarian needs, and hindered effective humanitarian response. Civilians continue to suffer from death, injury, intimidation, loss of livelihoods and displacement. In 2008, only two thirds of the annual food requirements could be harvested, while the escalating armed conflict led to increased concerns about the protection of civilians. During 2008, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan recorded 2,118 civilian casualties — a 40 per cent increase from 2007. Fifty-five per cent of civilian deaths were caused by insurgents and 39 per cent of the dead were unintentional victims of joint military operations by international and Afghan security forces. Children were often among the victims, and, moreover, the number of children associated with insurgents is reportedly on the rise, including as suicide bombers. Reported violent incidents against schools during 2008 totalled an estimated 256 incidents, resulting in some 58 deaths and 46 injuries. Meanwhile, humanitarian access was further constrained by growing insecurity, including targeted attacks against aid workers and humanitarian operations.

18. In Iraq, recent political and security developments have paved the way for modest numbers of internally displaced person returns and present new opportunities for strengthened humanitarian support in other sectors. However, the provision of safe drinking water, health care, food and protection to an estimated 2.8 million internally displaced persons continues to be a challenge. Civilians still account for the majority of casualties, on average, with 13 civilians killed every day in 2008. In addition, an estimated 2 million Iraqis continue to live as refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries.

19. In Zimbabwe, where 6 million people have limited or no access to safe water and sanitation, the establishment of an inclusive Government in February 2009 was a positive development, paving the way for enhanced humanitarian response. The cholera epidemic outbreak in August 2008 worsened an already severe humanitarian situation, as it rapidly expanded to all 10 provinces and led to over 97,000 reported cases and over 4,200 deaths. During 2008, the capacity of humanitarian actors to respond was temporarily affected by Government and United Nations security restrictions, restrictions on financial transactions and imports as well as the effects of hyperinflation. While humanitarian operations continue, concerns remain that the situation could worsen, as the dilapidation of the basic service infrastructure continues.

20. Where the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have been able to respond to complex emergencies, they have been effective in providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to populations in need. For example they were able to provide relief assistance to 600,000 internally displaced persons and 2.5 million vulnerable women and children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; 8.7 million people received food assistance in Afghanistan, of whom 1.2 million were children under the age of five, and 550,000 were pregnant/lactating women; and an estimated 7 million people received various degrees of food assistance in Zimbabwe. In response to the ongoing global food crisis, United Nations entities and partners together with national Governments provided food and nutritional assistance to an additional 30 million people, bringing the total number of recipients to 100 million.

III. Humanitarian assistance: current challenges

A. Respecting and implementing guiding principles of humanitarian assistance at the operational level: assisting affected populations

21. As civilians continue to suffer and face severe deprivation as a result of armed conflict and disasters associated with natural hazards, humanitarian activities remain essential to support and supplement the endeavours of host States and parties to conflicts, to protect and meet the basic needs of persons within their area of control.

The normative framework underpinning humanitarian action

22. Under international humanitarian law, parties to an armed conflict have the primary responsibility for protecting and meeting the needs of persons within their control. In situations where they are unwilling or unable to do so, humanitarian actors have an important subsidiary role to play. In such circumstances, parties should agree to relief operations that are humanitarian and impartial in character, while allowing and facilitating timely and unimpeded passage of relief supplies, equipment and personnel.

23. Humanitarian action is conducted in complex and multi-polar environments. Respect for and adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are therefore critical to ensuring the distinction of humanitarian action from other activities, thereby preserving the space and integrity needed to deliver humanitarian assistance effectively to all people in need (see General Assembly resolution 46/182). Humanity emphasizes that the sole purpose of humanitarian action is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found; impartiality requires humanitarian actors to make no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions in their operations and to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress; neutrality precludes humanitarian actors from taking sides in hostilities or engaging in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature;[1] and independence requires humanitarian objectives to remain autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold in areas where humanitarian action is being implemented (see General Assembly resolution 58/114). The neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action facilitate its acceptance by all actors, ensuring that it is not considered an improper interference in the domestic affairs of Member States.

24. As highlighted in General Assembly resolution 46/182, and reiterated in subsequent resolutions, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Member States must be fully respected in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Challenges to principled humanitarian action

25. Humanitarian principles are accepted and have been repeatedly reaffirmed by Member States, United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian actors, and

[1] Definitions originally adopted in the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, proclaimed by the twentieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Vienna, 1965, and subsequently employed by the humanitarian community more generally.

the security, political and development branches of the Organization. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring respect for these principles from all actors on the ground. Humanitarian actors' capacity to operate in a principled manner is becoming more difficult owing to several challenges, which include a worrying increase in attacks against humanitarian workers and their facilities; and the proliferation of political, military and private sector actors venturing into traditional areas of "humanitarian" work and labelling their efforts as such. This leads to complex challenges of coordination and the risk of a dangerous blurring of distinction between humanitarian and military or political actors. One particularly negative consequence of these developments is the marked reduction of humanitarian actors' ability to reach populations in need and, conversely, that of affected persons to reach humanitarian assistance, and to do so in safety.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel

26. In 2008, the Department for Safety and Security of the Secretariat (UNDSS) reported a 36 per cent increase in deaths of United Nations — including humanitarian — personnel caused by malicious acts. Of the 25 reported deaths in 2008, 20 occurred in Africa (including 17 in Algeria, 1 each in Chad, Kenya and Ethiopia), 1 in Pakistan and 4 in the Middle East (1 in Lebanon and 3 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory). The trend continued of locally recruited personnel being the most vulnerable, accounting for the majority of casualties, arrests, detentions and harassments. Out of the total number of 25 deaths, 21 involved locally recruited staff members. During 2008, the Department also reported 63 deaths of international and national staff of NGOs resulting from malicious acts, including: 18 in Somalia, 17 in Afghanistan, 14 in the Sudan, 6 in Pakistan, 4 in Chad and 1 each in Burundi, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

27. These acts are sometimes perpetrated by criminal elements for opportunistic reasons. In other contexts they are politically motivated, for example, in reaction to the perceived affiliation of humanitarian actors with security or political agendas. In Darfur, for example, both patterns are evident. During 2008, 11 aid workers were killed, 216 humanitarian workers and associated personnel were kidnapped, a total of 277 humanitarian vehicles were hijacked and humanitarian personnel reported 192 break-ins. In Chad, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the prevalence of criminality has resulted in temporary but increasingly frequent suspensions of humanitarian activities. In these contexts, the increase in criminality has been linked to the fragmentation and proliferation of armed groups. In Afghanistan, more than 40 humanitarian aid convoys and 47 aid facilities were attacked, ambushed or looted in 2008. NGO personnel fatalities in 2008 were reportedly the highest since 2002 and double those of 2007. By 2008, 65 per cent of violent incidents against humanitarian personnel and operations were attributable to armed opposition groups. Humanitarian actors attribute the motivation of attacks against them to their perceived association with the parties to the military operations and the political stabilization effort.

28. Violence against humanitarian and associated personnel is sometimes accompanied by hostile attitudes and even incitement against humanitarian workers by the media. This not only risks fuelling attacks, but undermines the fundamental respect for humanitarian actors and their efforts to ensure acceptance by local communities through neutral and impartial assistance.

29. The prevalence and severity of violence against humanitarian workers, facilities and assets inhibit their mobility and field presence, often preventing life-saving aid delivery to hundreds of thousands of people. Therefore, parties to conflict are urged to take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, facilities and supplies within their areas of control and discourage incitement to violence against humanitarian personnel, facilities and assets. In this regard, the public reaffirmation by all actors — including Governments and parties to conflict alike — of the humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence of the humanitarian aid and also the positive role of humanitarian actors is an important step.

Increasing number of actors involved in humanitarian assistance

30. During the past two decades the number of actors conducting humanitarian activities has increased significantly, as has the scrutiny of their activities. Inevitably the inappropriate behaviour of one actor is likely to impact the acceptance and operations of others. Therefore, all humanitarian actors must continue to ensure conformity with humanitarian principles and uphold the highest level of conduct and discipline. Codes of conduct providing general guidance to operations of humanitarian actors have existed for a considerable time, such as the 1995 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. Furthermore, United Nations entities and partners must uphold a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse as mandated by my predecessor (see ST/SGB/2003/13). Humanitarian actors operating in some contexts have elaborated country-specific instruments such as, most recently, the "Inter-Agency Basic Operating Rules for Humanitarian Actors" working in Pakistan. While these are important initiatives, the challenges lie in raising awareness of humanitarian principles and such codes among humanitarian actors and in promoting compliance.

Distinguishing between humanitarian and military or political actors

31. Military forces sometimes play a critical role in facilitating humanitarian action, including by establishing a secure environment for humanitarian assistance delivery. For example, naval escorts for the World Food Programme (WFP) food shipments to Somalia since November 2007 have proven a successful deterrent against piracy attacks. However, recent years have witnessed a sharp increase in the involvement of military actors in the direct delivery of humanitarian assistance, which generally is viewed as posing more of a concern owing to a blurring of the lines between military and political motivations and strictly humanitarian concerns. While there can be situations in both conflict and natural disaster settings where the military has the unique capability to deliver assistance in the time and scale necessary, military and political actors should generally refrain from engaging in direct aid delivery and from labelling their operations as "humanitarian", specifically when other alternatives exist. This is particularly the case where military forces or peacekeeping forces are perceived as being party to a conflict.

Balancing coherence in United Nations operations and principled humanitarian action

32. Blurring of humanitarian, political and security objectives can also occur within United Nations operations, particularly in so-called integrated missions,

where humanitarian actors work alongside political and peacekeeping missions. The United Nations has made progress in ensuring that the vital aim of increased coherence of operations in integrated missions does not undermine the necessity to deliver humanitarian assistance in a way consistent with, and perceived by local populations as being consistent with, the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

33. In 2008, I decided that the United Nations would adopt an "integrated approach" to multidimensional country operations to maximize the strategic coherence and collaboration of United Nations operations. Integration, defined as an "effective strategic partnership" between the United Nations mission (whether political or peacekeeping) and the humanitarian country team, with strengthened country-level planning arrangements, aims to ensure that the Organization works together and with States to enable the greatest positive impact in conflict and post-conflict situations. Critically, my decision stipulated that integration arrangements should take full account of humanitarian principles and safeguard humanitarian actors' capacity to operate in a principled manner, while facilitating effective coordination.

34. The United Nations system is developing system-wide policy guidance to implement this approach. A key aspect of this will revolve around situation analysis, to ascertain the level of conflict and fluidity of the situation before an appropriate degree of integration is determined. This will be particularly important in situations of ongoing conflict or where a peace process has yet to take root. In such cases, there is a particular risk that humanitarian actors will be perceived as aligned with political or peacekeeping agendas, which may compromise the ability of humanitarian agencies' to operate in a principled way. In some such instances, coordinated but diverse approaches taking full account of the various strengths and objectives of political and humanitarian mandates could be an appropriate way to maintain effective operations. It is critical that in promoting strategic and operational coherence, the international community remains committed and proactive in safeguarding the capacity of humanitarian actors to operate in a principled manner.

Gaining access to people in need

35. Timely assistance to populations in need is a fundamental prerequisite for humanitarian action. Access for humanitarian workers to affected communities is constrained by several factors, some of which do not constitute deliberate obstructions or violations of international humanitarian law. In several contexts, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan and Sri Lanka, the intensity of military operations have posed a significant impediment to effective aid delivery. In other contexts, seasonal conditions have limited the ability of humanitarian workers to reach people in need. The most severe constraint to the effective deployment and delivery of relief items and workers, however, remains the introduction of overly bureaucratic procedures aimed at controlling the delivery of aid. These procedures have prevented distribution, caused undue delays, and have sometimes rendered life-saving relief items, including food and medicines, unusable in such contexts as Darfur, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Somalia, Sri Lanka or Zimbabwe.

36. The consequences of impeding the delivery of life-saving assistance to communities in need include prolonging and exacerbating human suffering. Therefore those responsible for deliberately denying access to persons in need should be held accountable. The prevalence and severity of access constraints increase the costs of humanitarian assistance. They constrain the ability of humanitarian actors to assess humanitarian needs and to monitor the distribution of aid. The impartiality of aid risks being compromised if humanitarian actors have access to only part of an affected population, or can only have limited or inconsistent interaction with the affected population. Moreover, reduced presence and mobility prevent humanitarian actors from having the continued engagement with local communities and other actors in the very contexts where sustained liaison with all relevant parties is essential to facilitate understanding and acceptance of the purpose and modalities of humanitarian action. Humanitarian actors' security depends on a balanced approach that emphasizes acceptance by local stakeholders while maintaining context-appropriate security measures.

B. Addressing the impact of current global challenges and trends on the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance

37. Humanitarian stakeholders are increasingly concerned about the combined impacts of current global challenges such as climate change, extreme poverty, the food crisis, the financial crisis, water and energy scarcity, migration, population growth, urbanization, terrorism, and health pandemics. While anticipating the evolution of these often interdependent challenges — which are driven by various underlying political, economic, demographic, environmental and technological factors — is a complex task, it is clear that their individual and combined impacts are already shifting, and will continue to shape our way of life and its sustainability.

38. For humanitarian actors this poses two key questions: (a) how do these challenges impact the notion of "vulnerability" and humanitarian needs; and (b) how will these challenges shape the overall environment in which humanitarian actors will have to operate in the coming years.

Impacts on vulnerability and humanitarian need

39. Already today, global challenges are exacerbating vulnerability and increasing humanitarian needs. Since early 2008, an estimated 115 million additional people worldwide have joined the ranks of the hungry owing to the global food crisis. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that by the end of 2009, the world's hungry may well surpass 1 billion people, which represents roughly one sixth of the world's population. Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and changing the morbidity patterns of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Although the effects of climate change are felt globally, it is inevitable that those communities already among the poorest and most vulnerable and with limited coping mechanisms will suffer the most. Rapidly expanding desertification and the lack of access to water are threatening entire ways of life such as pastoralist or nomadic lifestyles.

40. The confluence of any number of these global challenges is likely to have even greater impact. They can no longer be viewed in singularity, nor can solutions be promoted that help to address one challenge but exacerbate the negative effects in

other sectors. Responses must take full account of the interdependence of these global challenges and their impact on the vulnerable. By 2025, the world's population is forecast to reach 8 billion, with most of the population growth occurring in less developed regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the population will have doubled from its size in 1998, with half of the population being under the age of 24. This demographic expansion coupled with changing consumption patterns will necessitate a corresponding increase in global food production by an estimated 50 per cent. Noting that agriculture currently consumes 70 per cent of the world's fresh water supply, an increase in food production and irrigation would imply a rise in water usage, which could further aggravate water shortages that already affect some 1 billion people (the number is expected to double to 2 billion people by 2025). Simultaneously, some predict a 50 per cent increase in energy demand by the end of 2030, 83 per cent of which would be for fossil fuels. Furthermore, by 2025, some 5 billion people (about two thirds of the world's population then) are likely to be living in an urban or peri-urban setting (compared to 3.17 billion in 2005). The rapid formation of slums in urban areas would lead to limited access to basic services such as food and clean water, while increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. Compounding these problems will be population pressures exerted by growing youth unemployment and by groups migrating to cities in search of better living conditions and economic opportunities. Parallel to these demographic changes, the impacts of the food, fuel and financial crises may continue to stunt GDP growth and economic recovery in many poor countries, forcing cuts to vital social safety nets, causing increased unemployment, pushing the already poor further into extreme poverty, particularly in rural areas with acute humanitarian needs, increasing the risk of social unrest and violence.

41. As recent crises in the outskirts of Harare, Mogadishu or Port-au-Prince have already illustrated, the combination of rapid urbanization, climate-related hazards, environmental degradation, and price spikes of fuel and basic food staples can severely impact the economic, food, health and environmental security of communities, and create new vulnerabilities and needs for emergency or life-saving assistance.

Impacts on the humanitarian operating environment

42. Operationally, global challenges and the resulting rising levels of vulnerability may require a fresh look at the way humanitarian actors operate. Exit and entry strategies may be harder to identify, and triggers for humanitarian response could become less shock-and-event driven and more focused on chronic needs or cyclical crises. The progression of extreme poverty and urbanization, combined with demographic shifts, may lead to the emergence of new types of vulnerable caseloads of people with severe life-saving or emergency needs, no different from those in traditional humanitarian contexts. These challenges will also lead to assistance being needed for caseloads that many humanitarian actors have less experience assisting — for example, urban or elderly populations. A changed financial landscape may require enhancing monitoring and financial tracking mechanisms; identifying new sources of funding; and finding mechanisms to address increasing humanitarian caseloads with potentially stagnating or even less funding.

43. Yet there are also opportunities to mitigate humanitarian crises and enhance operational efficacy. Technological innovations could provide new tools to mitigate and address humanitarian crises. The use of satellite imagery and improved

telecommunication mapping systems, for example, has increased the ability to assess humanitarian caseloads that are beyond immediate reach. Technology is also expanding early warning capacity; for example the rising use of cell phones in Africa is alerting people earlier to hazards. Inventions such as low-cost computers, water purifying drinking straws, and innovations in therapeutic feeding and vaccines have and will change humanitarian responses. Staying aware of these developments, while fostering partnerships to incorporate them at an accelerated pace into humanitarian operations, will be key.

The way forward

44. In addition to humanitarian emergencies driven by single events, an outbreak of conflict or the onset of earthquakes or tsunamis, there will be an increasing number of emergencies driven by a broad range of non-traditional threats emanating from intersecting global challenges. Whereas the humanitarian system is currently primarily response-driven, the challenges outlined above will necessitate better preparedness, with greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction; and more focus on building, strengthening and coordinating response capacity at the local, national and regional levels. Importantly, there will need to be greater information sharing and coordination between the humanitarian and development realms, away from traditional compartmentalization towards joint efforts in providing timely and simultaneous responses to both immediate and longer-term needs, for example, as recommended by the high-level task force on the global food security crisis in the Comprehensive Framework for Action.

45. New strategies for aid provision may be required to address the challenges at hand. For instance, greater use of new technologies in humanitarian programming and non-traditional assistance mechanisms such as cash-based distribution instruments could be considered in communities where markets function. Addressing longer-term food and nutrition vulnerabilities will require innovative programming combining different forms of safety nets. Additional efforts are required to strengthen needs assessments to make them more inclusive and "forward-looking", building upon existing vulnerability analysis and early warning capacities.

46. In order to confront these challenges, humanitarian actors may need to find ways to enhance coordination with non-traditional partners (e.g., development, scientific, financial, legal, and regional organizations; private sector, etc.) as many of these actors have the expertise and capacity to analyse longer-term structural trends and provide longer-term solutions that could help to minimize the demand for humanitarian assistance. In the short term, however, it appears that the demand for humanitarian aid will continue to rise, particularly in areas not traditionally associated with humanitarian assistance.

IV. Progress in the coordination of humanitarian assistance

A. Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance

47. In 2006, the United Nations launched reform efforts aimed at increasing its capacity, capability, predictability, accountability and equity in humanitarian action. The initiative focused on the four areas of capacity and coordination in the field,

leadership, partnerships and predictable and equitable humanitarian financing. In 2009, these initiatives are firmly in place.

Capacity and coordination in the field

48. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners are increasing efforts to strengthen global humanitarian coordination capacities, through improved preparedness, inter-cluster coordination, training and development of inter-cluster guidance and assessments.

49. The implementation of the cluster approach[2] has strengthened capacity in the field. The additional designation of thematic leads — the Global Cluster Leads — has strengthened humanitarian leadership and accountability particularly towards national stakeholders and provided stronger bases for partnership among all actors. Stakeholders and national authorities are increasingly endorsing the cluster approach as the agreed humanitarian coordination framework in major emergencies. During the reporting period, the cluster approach was implemented in 13 additional countries, bringing the total number of countries where the approach is implemented to 24.

50. A second phase of the independent evaluation is planned to assess the overall effectiveness of the cluster approach — including the role of the Global Clusters — in facilitating and supporting joint humanitarian response at country level, in support of the efforts of national Governments and actors.

Enhanced humanitarian coordination: the resident and humanitarian coordinator system

51. Strengthened humanitarian leadership capacity in the field is critical for effective response. Efforts to date have focused on strengthening the quality of coordinators through better selection, training, and performance appraisal. In 2007, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) launched a three-year workplan to this effect.

52. During the reporting period significant progress has been made in enhancing accountability mechanisms. Resident coordinators' accountability to the Emergency Relief Coordinator has been strengthened with regard to response and response preparedness; all humanitarian coordinators have signed a compact with the Emergency Relief Coordinator; and the Performance Appraisal System developed by the United Nations Development Group for resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators/designated officials was enhanced. The terms of reference for humanitarian coordinators were revised to take into account the different pillars of humanitarian reform and a more professional selection system has been developed with the launch of the second phase of the humanitarian coordinator pool. Training on humanitarian coordination was conducted for all resident coordinators, while knowledge management tools are being developed on the resident coordinator's role in the event of a disaster.

[2] The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between ICRC and the United Nations will continue to the extent necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and strengthened response for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.

53. These efforts will have limited impact, unless coupled with concerted efforts to ensure that: the United Nations system interfaces with coordinators consistently; the management of coordinators' performance is improved; the consistency of the support provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to humanitarian coordinators is enhanced; and OCHA support to resident coordinators in the area of response preparedness is strengthened. These factors should be underpinned by a strengthened commitment by all stakeholders to humanitarian coordination.

Predictability of response: humanitarian financing

54. Well-targeted, timely and needs-based humanitarian response plans provide the basis for a properly functioning humanitarian financing system. In this regard, the consolidated appeals process was significantly strengthened through an increase in the speed of flash appeal publication, clear project prioritization in the majority of consolidated appeals processes and the inclusion of more NGO projects.

55. Adequate, predicable and timely funding is critical to an effective humanitarian response. In 2008, increased emphasis was placed on improving the quantity and quality of funding, including maintaining a diversity of funding channels. This led to an increase in the volume of humanitarian funding to $12 billion, as recorded by the Financial Tracking Service. An increased amount of funding was channelled through the humanitarian pooled funds. The total funding received by the three common humanitarian funds in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic amounted to $294 million, while active emergency response funds administered by OCHA received another $110 million predominantly for initiatives implemented by non-governmental organizations. During the same period $453 million was received by the Central Emergency Response Fund. Overall, pooled funds have served to improve the speed and coordination of funding for humanitarian response, working in tandem with other humanitarian funding mechanisms such as the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund, which provides rapid assistance to emergencies.

56. Key to strengthening the humanitarian financing system are continuing efforts to: improve the quantity and quality of humanitarian funding; ensure greater coherence among funding streams; and strengthen coordination on humanitarian financing tools with cluster leads and resident and humanitarian coordinators.

Equity and accountability of response: enhancing needs assessments

57. Efforts continue towards developing common approaches that allow humanitarian stakeholders to jointly determine needs and priorities in a timely manner, particularly during sudden-onset crises. Humanitarian actors are mapping the various humanitarian and early recovery assessment tools. The mapping products include a proposed framework for sequencing different types of needs assessments according to crises phases and measures to improve multi-sectoral needs assessment processes and tools, including for preparedness and capacity-building.

58. IASC recommended that a prototype tool for consolidating core humanitarian information in a consistent and accessible manner — currently referred to as the "humanitarian dashboard" — should be further developed and field tested in

multiple emergency contexts. In this regard, IASC requested OCHA to prepare a strengthened version of the dashboard for roll-out by the end of 2009.

Partnerships

59. In addition to strengthening partnerships on the ground through more inclusive and equitable coordination mechanisms, partnerships at the global level continue to be expanded. In an attempt to further strengthen humanitarian partnerships, in 2008 three NGOs have joined the IASC Principals forum, in addition to the three existing NGO consortia. The Global Humanitarian Platform, which brings together United Nations humanitarian organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs, met for the second time in July 2008. It has increased efforts to broaden the inclusion of national NGOs, particularly from developing countries, and strengthen their capacity to participate in the forum. At the Global Humanitarian Platform Principals meeting in 2008, it was agreed that the Platform would meet with the twin objectives of assessing the extent to which the Principles of Partnership are being used to strengthen partnerships and providing a forum for open discussions of humanitarian thematic issues. With this in mind, several strategic areas of focus were identified for the next meeting of the Platform, including climate change, humanitarian and military relationships and humanitarian financing.

B. Improving coordination, harmonizing response and strengthening capacities for providing support to survivors of gender-based violence

60. Humanitarian crises increase the vulnerability of women and girls — and occasionally that of men and boys — to sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. Improvements have been made in coordination and protection, addressing impunity and providing multi-sectoral support to survivors. Additional efforts are required to ensure that humanitarian actors mainstream gender into all operations, including improved collection and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data. A review of projects in consolidated appeals for 23 post-conflict countries during the period 2006-2008 indicated that 2.3 per cent of them addressed gender issues — either by including women as major beneficiaries or by addressing gender-based violence. This figure suggests a significant shortfall and a need for more effective measures to track gender funding.

61. While humanitarian actors have observed that gender-based violence coordination has improved, a further assessment of current gender-based violence coordination structures is ongoing. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations has developed a Comprehensive Strategy for Combating Sexual Violence, supported by United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. This strategy has helped to address gaps and maximize the use of resources and therefore should be replicated in similar situations. In Myanmar, the Women's Protection Working Group has coordinated programme planning in response to Cyclone Nargis. In the Sudan, the presence of senior-level gender-based violence coordinators in each Darfur state has strengthened gender-based violence programming, despite lack of cooperation from the Sudanese Government. A field guide on how to improve gender-based violence coordination is currently being developed.

62. United Nations entities have intensified capacity development efforts to ensure that well-trained professionals with gender and gender-based violence expertise are deployed to humanitarian operations. The IASC Gender Standby Capacity project has deployed 29 advisers to 18 humanitarian crises, including one at the global level, to strengthen the clusters' capacity to address gender-based violence, improve gender analysis and mainstreaming, and strengthen the use of sex- and age-disaggregated data.

63. To address gaps in knowledge about gender-based violence, the United Nations has reviewed the jurisprudence of international tribunals and courts on sexual violence during conflict; examined methodologies for data collection and analysed motivations for sexual violence, including against men and boys, in conflict. Additionally, the United Nations has developed systems for collecting and sharing data on gender-based violence; rolled out standard operating procedures for gender-based violence; piloted gender-based violence coordination training and completed an inter-agency e-learning programme to enhance the skills of humanitarian workers to ensure that women, girls, boys and men have safe access to and equally benefit from humanitarian assistance.

C. Update on White Helmets

64. The present section is prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/220, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to suggest measures to enhance the integration of the White Helmets initiative into the work of the United Nations system. The White Helmets initiative was established by the Government of Argentina in 1993, to promote pre-identified, standby and trained national volunteer corps placed at the disposal of the Secretary-General and the United Nations to support relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. The initiative was adopted into the United Nations organizational framework in 1994 (see General Assembly resolution 49/139 B).

65. During the past two years, the White Helmets volunteers have supported United Nations operations in different regions. In attempts to strengthen White Helmets support to United Nations response efforts, in April 2007 the White Helmets Commission and WFP in the Plurinational State of Bolivia conducted a joint assessment mission in response to the floods in Beni. In mid-2008, WFP hosted in Panama a two-day seminar with the White Helmets on WFP operational modalities. It was agreed during the meeting that the White Helmets would initiate a proposal for community-level cooperation in the areas of common interest such as supply chain and storage management, distribution and needs assessment.

66. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the White Helmets have signed a memorandum of understanding in 1995 providing the basis for UNV support to the White Helmets, including the management of the White Helmets contributions account. To date the only donor to this account has been the Argentine Government. UNV has provided administrative support to the White Helmets humanitarian response activities in Cuba, Haiti, Ukraine and the occupied Palestinian territories. A number of White Helmets were trained and deployed through the UNDAC mechanism to support the South Asia tsunami response and floods responses in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Honduras in 2006-2007.

67. A priority for the United Nations humanitarian system remains the provision of capacity support, whenever possible, to local, national and regional humanitarian response capacities. With enhanced coordination with the international humanitarian system, the White Helmets may provide an interesting model for regional and local volunteer organizations responding to disasters. The White Helmets initiative should explore mechanisms to share best practices with other regional organizations in disaster-prone areas. In this regard, it will be equally important to draw on the expertise of relevant volunteer-based organizations and to support efforts for strengthening volunteer-based organizations worldwide.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

68. On the basis of the above, Member States are encouraged to consider the following:

(a) Member States, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations are urged to promote greater respect for, and adherence to, the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence;

(b) Safe, timely and unhindered access to vulnerable populations is a prerequisite for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. States are urged to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and supplies to affected communities;

(c) Member States and non-State actors are urged to take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, facilities and supplies within their areas of control. In this regard, they are urged to refrain from public statements and incitement that could jeopardize the safety and security of humanitarian workers;

(d) The United Nations system and humanitarian partners are encouraged to strengthen preparedness, with greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction and particularly on strengthening response capacities at the local, national and regional levels, including national civil society organizations. In this regard, strengthened information management and coordination with development actors and other local, national and regional partners are critical to identify future needs and help humanitarian actors expand their knowledge base;

(e) Member States are called upon to maintain a diversity of humanitarian funding channels, and to provide consistent and predictable support to these channels to meet existing and growing humanitarian needs. This includes the provision of early and multi-year commitments to humanitarian pooled funds (Central Emergency Response Fund, common humanitarian funds, emergency response funds) as well as complementary support to humanitarian agencies' individual emergency reserves and other traditional sources of funding for humanitarian programmes;

(f) Member States are urged to strengthen efforts to address sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, including by preventing, investigating and prosecuting such violence in humanitarian emergencies, and to play their part in the joint development of comprehensive strategies to combat sexual violence;

(g) The White Helmets initiative is encouraged to enhance coordination with the international humanitarian system and explore mechanisms to share best practices on disaster response and preparedness with other regional organizations in disaster-prone areas.